

Staines Town 3, Wycombe Wanderers 1 (a.e.t.)

WYCOMBE Wanderers were 30 seconds away from a place in the semi-finals of the Rothmans Isthmian League Cup on Monday night when Staines forced an equaliser and then hit two more goals in extra time to run out surprise winners. (writes Stuart Earp).

The last gasp equaliser was a stunning blow for Wycombe to take and yet they could only blame themselves for not sewing up the match in a second half they dominated throughout. There were two occasions when players had only the goalkeeper to beat but both missed their chances.

Staines now go through to meet Hendon away in the semis and their hard graft and spirit will serve them well. Wycombe failed to match that aggression in extra time which was virtually all one way traffic.

Wanderers will point to a hard bumpy pitch as some excuse for the defeat. One or two peculiar bounces made life hazardous for the goalkeepers and indeed, Peter Spittle might well have saved Staines' equaliser on a better surface, the ball bobbling over his arms as he dived to stop Eggie James' shot.

But overall it was the Blues' same old inability to score goals that brought defeat. They certainly can't blame their defence which worked wonders to keep Staines out until extra time while the mid-field men also did their share, especially John Priestley, who had one of his best games for Wanderers.

Spittle produced two good saves from the dangerous Eggie James but at the other end, Staines' offside trap caught out Wycombe too often early on. Dylan Evans cracked in one powerful drive but straight at the 6' 7" frame of goalkeeper Kelvin Hopkins.

There were few Wycombe chances in the first 45 minutes, however and the front runners seldom looked happy, particularly top goalscorer Ian Pearson who wasted far too much possession.

But the Blues took little time in going ahead in the second half, scoring just one minute after the re-start. Priestley won the ball inside his own half and beat four players in a tremendous run before turning a shot past Hopkins and onto the far post. The ball bounced out to Howard Kettleborough who made no mistake.

This gave Wanderers a real boost and they forced numerous errors from the home side whose 'up and under' tactics posed few problems to the defence. Wycombe's more constructive football looked far more dangerous and after Evans had driven wide first time, Alan Phillips put Pearson through with only Hopkins to beat. But his drive struck the 'keeper and went for a corner.

Former Wanderer Rob Williams saw a header well saved by Spittle who quickly sent Holifield away. Again Mick had a one against one chance but he took too long in teeing up his shot which flew wide.

The miss looked inexpensive as the minutes ticked away but then, with just 30 seconds remaining, James poked in a shot from Staines' last attack that bounced over Spittle's arms and into the net to force extra time.

James had a goal disallowed in the first period of additional time while Holifield forced a diving save from Hopkins but in the final 15 minutes, the home side grabbed two more goals to clinch the game. Peter Beasant got the second with a spectacular shot which flew over Spittle's head and under the crossbar after 112 minutes and in the closing stages Peter Shaw nodded home Billy Salkeld's corner at the far post.

Wycombe will not get a better example of the consequences of failing to take chances than this defeat. With important league matches coming up, they must convert a great number of scoring opportunities if they are to get among the honours this season.

STAINES: K. Hopkins, G. Hart, R. Williams, P. Shaw, R. Brown, P. Beasant, R. Hymes, W. Salkeld, A. Rowlands (sub G. Talbot 77 mins), E. James, J. Love.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, G. Mackenzie (sub. G. Fraser, 105 mins), J. Priestley, M. Holifield, I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough, D. Evans.

Referee: E. Day (Walthamstow).

Half time: 0-0. **Goalscorers, Staines,** James (90), Beasant (112), Shaw (118) **Wycombe,** Kettleborough (46).